BASEBALL AS PLAYED IN CRICKET'S HOME TOWN

By HAROLD E. SCARBOROUGH

Illustrations by J. NORMAN LYND

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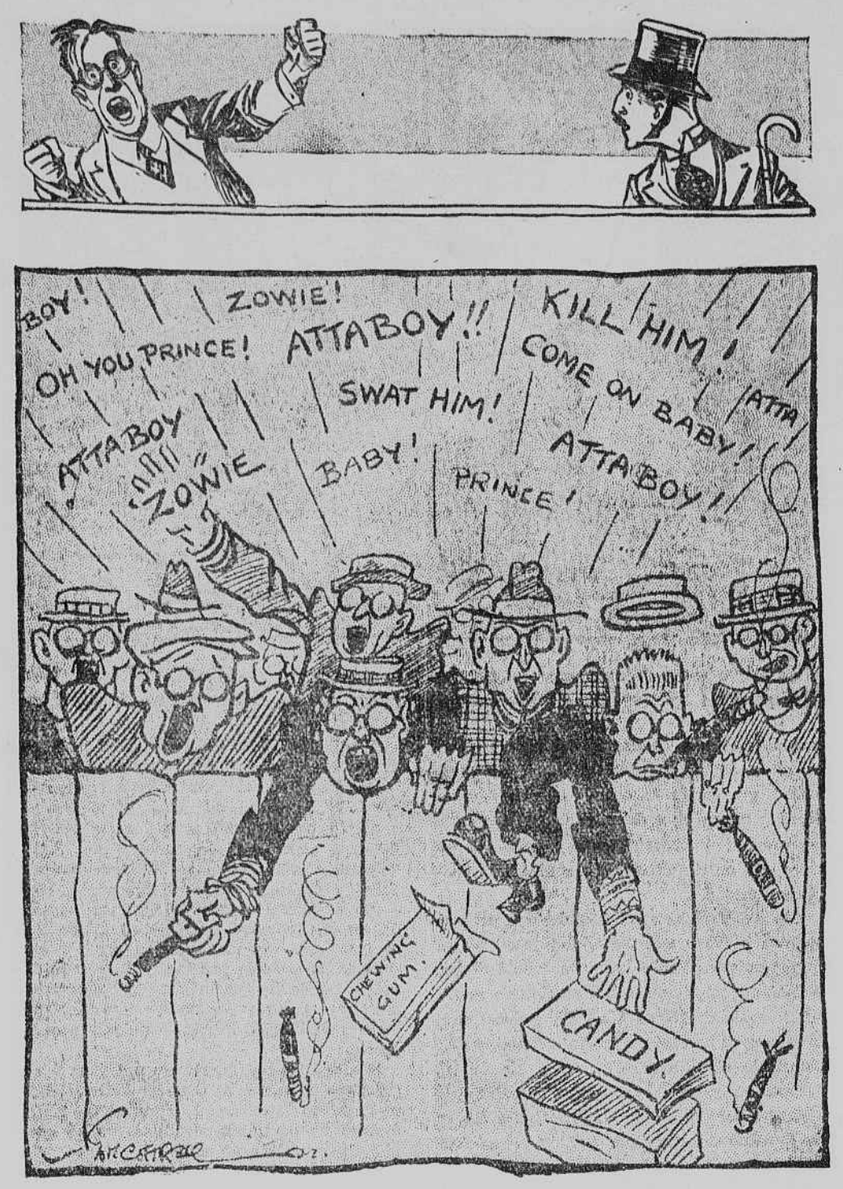


An English artist's impression of a section of baseball rooters

(From The London Express)

My British friend did not at all wish to go

LONDON.

AFTER an Englishman and an American have known each other for several years it is safe for the former to take the latter to a cricket match and to explain the game to him. Likewise, it will probably not prove disruptive of friendship for the American to invite the Englishman to witness a game of baseball (if it can be found). But for casual acquaintances the procedure is not recommended; it is too great a strain on friendly relations—far worse than discussing the British debt to the United States or arguing as to who won the war.

The above conditions having been fulfilled, last Sunday an English acquaintance and I made our way to Stamford Bridge, which in times of normalcy is the Chelsea Football Ground. I had last year slept through several days of cricket with him, and deemed it only fair that he should see for himself that baseball is not a game which permits of novel-reading between innings.

The suburb of Walham Green was evidently sleeping off the effects of its Sunday dinner; the only people abroad were unmistakably American, and they were all heading in one direction. Thither went we.

"What on earth"— —my companion began, and pointed to a large sign:

"Reserved Seats—Home Plate—Four shillings and ninepence."

"I thought," he added, "that we were going to a baseball match, not a race. What is the Home Plate? I don't know of any race of that name. Are you sure it isn't the Yorkshire Selling Plate or something like that? Or perhaps they mean 'The Home Counties Plate.'"

A couple of husky gobs from the battleship Utah, whose team was booked to meet one rcruited from the London Post of the American Legion, looked curiously at him. I paid for our seats and pushed him through the turnstile.

"To convey the real atmosphere of the game," I began as we sought our seats, "this space behind the grandstand should be full of venders selling peanuts, popcorn, pink lemonade or hot dogs."

He pointed to a solitary stand, whereon was a legend:

"Real American Pea-Nuts, Twopence."

"'Monkey-nuts,' we call them," he said.

And without further conversation we sought our seats.

"I say," he began, as soon as we were comfortably settled, "hadn't we better book our places for tea? There seems quite a crowd here. And what time is the tea interval?"

"There isn't any."

"What a ghastly game! But where are the players? And who are those chaps out there on the field—those knickerbocker johnnies?"

"They are the players," I answered. "And as soon as you have told me that the game is only glorified rounders I'll try to tell you something about it."

We sat silent while both sides had their batting practice. Then the Legionnaires took the field; and about 200 sailors began rooting in a mild fashion.

"Good Lord!" my friend gasped. "What has happened?"

"Why, nothing, except that the game is starting."

"Fancy this—in London—on Sunday, too! Do you think we shall be raided by the police?"

At a cricket match, it should be explained, the spectators are permitted to clap decorously at long intervals. Any one who speaks above a whisper immediately becomes the target of hostile eyes and would doubtless meet dark and nameless punishment should he persist.

"No," I said; "I don't think so. Just wait till the game gets exciting. Then there may be some real noise."

"Real noise!" he gasped. "And this person behind us is deafening me! Why do they need an oil can?"

The man behind us had taken off his coat and was shouting:

"Oh, get an oil can! You're rusty as a gate!"

I explained as best I could; and my friend again relapsed into gloomy and morose silence. At about the fifth inning he spoke up again.

"I thought," he began with elaborate sarcasm, "you told me cricket was slow. Well, they've been playing an hour and they've only made three runs between them. In cricket there'd have been 75, at least."

And a few minutes later:

"Oh, well caught!"

The shortstop of the Utah nine had picked up a line drive with one hand while in a full run.

Then minutes more:

"Throw it to the catcher, you idiot!"

The Legionnaire pitcher, fielding a hunt made with the bases full, had played to catch the batter at first instead of nabbing the man on third at the plate.

At the end of the eighth inning it was I who had to insist that if we wished to keep an appointment made for 6 o'clock we should have to leave without waiting for the end. My British friend did not at all wish to go, but was consoled when I assured him that, with the score at 5 to 2 in favor of the navy team, it was not probable that the remaining half inning to be played would show any decided change in the result.

In the underground going home he said:

"A remarkable game, and I could even see how you Americans could work up some interest about it. . . . But it isn't cricket."

That, generally speaking, is the British verdict on the series of baseball games played in London this summer. Out in Wales they have taken more favorably to our national sport, and have even organized a couple of leagues, the Welsh League and the Cardiff Wednesday League. Intercounty games are played, and one of the strongest county nines is Glamorganshire, which, incidentally, has the strongest Welsh cricket team. In London, however, baseball is still enough of a novelty to merit detailed descriptions and explanations in the newspapers.

"The Evening Standard," commenting on last Sunday's game, said:

"Baseball is some game! Apparently, if you want to play it properly, you have to grow up like a young giant and attire yourself in so many clothes and protective appliances that you are fit for service in the Arctic regions. In comparison with our footballers in their thin 'shorts' and jerseys, these baseballers were polar explorers.

"They did a lot of speedy running, but each man was in thick woolen clothes fastened up to the neck, thick woolen stockings that covered the knees, heavy boots, tight-fitting caps that were never in any circumstances taken off, and a whole outfitters' store of leather gloves, pads and face cages. . . .

"The catcher is heavily armored, but carries no gun. Stretching down his chest is a great padded protector. His shins are walled in. On one hand he wears a gigantic glove that is padded, and resembles a big-sized motorcycle seat. Finally, he fits a sort of iron grating over his face, and stoops down so closely behind the batsman that one wonders how he avoids getting hit. . . .

"The bat they use in baseball (which, of course, is only rounders de luxe) is like an office-chair leg. The white ball has a core of rubber closely bound and encased in horsehide."

"The Daily Express" began its comment thus:

"A stranger passing Stamford Bridge grounds yesterday afternoon might have thought pandemonium had broken loose. The air was filled with shouts and cries that created the impression that an angry mob was committing violence. It was simply a throng of American baseball 'fans,' vocally venting their enthusiasm at a baseball game between teams for the U. S. battleship Utah and the American Legion. They numbered 4,000, but the noise they made in encouraging their favorites would have done justice to ten times that number."

The most diplomatic comment of all was made by "The London Times," which this morning ended an editorial with the sentence:

"Neither baseball nor cricket is likely to supplant the other in the country which is its natural home, but Americans and Englishmen can both unite in admiring the finer points of the game which the other country has evolved."

STATEN ISLAND AND THE PORT PLAN

By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

OLD walls and the ghosts of old walls loom through the haze of history and legend which envelops Staten Island in its glamour—walls of churches, houses, taverns, some still to serve for years to come, others crumbled into traditions.

With pride they spin the yarns of their past, do the Staten Islanders, but their talk to-day is of tariff walls and sea walls. The former they would raze, the latter they would raise. If they realize their aspirations they believe their island will be swept by prosperity as thoroughly as twice it was desolated by the Indians. In prospect are the creation of a free port and the making of harbors, beaches and parks.

There is a fascination in the idea of a free port that is felt—and jealously grudged—elsewhere than in that island which Dutch settlers christened in honor of the States General of the Netherlands, choosing to compliment a title rather than a name. From the discovery of the island in 1524 until they were expelled the Indians admitted into its borders imports of copper kettles, beads and the like, and took no thought of customs. Not so the thrifty Dutch. They exacted their duties on the wharves of New York.

Now Staten Island in its entirety is face to face with the opportunity of becoming a free port. Recent action by the Senate was directed toward the establishment in the United States of such free ports, or zones, where material and merchandise can enter free of duty, provided it be held there for manufacture, reassembling or repacking for shipment to other countries. The advantages in the employment of labor and the upbuilding of industries that would result can readily be seen to be considerable. The designation as a free port is one to be coveted.

Naturally, such a fine plum is not to fall for the wishing. Staten Island's eagerness and enthusiasm, it has been pointed out, should be indicated by its development of the waterfront of its south shore. That is only a small price to pay, committees are assuring residents in their efforts to arouse the widespread enthusiasm necessary to the success of the project.

And yet there are Staten Islanders who simply will not see points. Tradition says as much. There was the congregation of old St. Andrew's Church, for instance. A distressing percentage of it is rumored to have dropped off to sleep when the pastor thundered out his sermons. Another group in whom the exhortations struck home too deep for comfort were wont to adjourn in the midst of the discourse and play cards upon a flat tombstone. And one old sinner, singled out particularly, was moved to tear up his pew from the church floor, carry it back to his farm and turn it into a pigpen.

If such disregard prevails, Staten Island will have to yield the free port prize to Long Island or to New Jersey, an especial rival since the days when the Duke of York conveyed that colony to Berkley Carteret. To decide the dispute which then arose as to whether Staten Island was included in the grant it was agreed that all those islands in the bay or harbor should belong to New York which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours. This feat was accomplished for Staten Island by Christopher Billop in his good ship Bentley. As a reward the duke gave him the land on which was built the historic Billop house.

Among the pledges of good faith which Staten Island should give the powers who are to decree a free port is the improvement of the southerly lying harbors of Great Kills and Fresh Kills. At these towns little streams (the translation of the Dutch word "kills") flowed down into very snug harbors once upon a time, but these, along with their beaches, time and tide have treated rudely. As Dutch took from Indians, British from Dutch and Americans from British, so has the ocean taken Staten Island land; and old Neptune's inroads, while slower, have been the more sure.

A tall elm tree once grew near the beach at the foot of New Dorp Lane, one of the landmarks of the old Vanderbilt place. High in the branches it was a custom to hang a lantern as a beacon light to mariners. The beach is gone, as is the elm, victims of the relentless attack of the tides. Now the Elm Tree Light is a lighthouse, well off the shore.

The incident is typical of the westward drift of the sands, wearing away beach after beach. The worst sufferer has been Great Kills Harbor. Once upon a time many a craft stole past Crooks Point into welcome shelter from the squalls sweeping in from the Atlantic past Sandy Hook. Now the beach is worn down to the edge of salt meadows and the Point is a sandy waste of an island behind which boats of light draft can creep at high tide and only then. It is only a matter of time when the harbor shall be useless, a mere marsh.

The fate of the harbor gives rise to the curious paradox that progress is not always progress. Once a grist mill stood on a Kills channel through the meadows to the sea. Grinding grist, the flood tide whirled in, finding rest in a great millpond, where the mill locks held it imprisoned. It won its release at ebb tide, rushing forth, performing the task imposed on it and with scarcely lessened velocity seeking the sea. It was these swirling waters, bound for an outlet past the Point, that helped make for Great Kills such an admirable little harbor.

Progress, finding other ways to grind grist, did away with the mill, and almost with the harbor, too. The tides ceased their benevolent dredging. The drift of sand cut the neck of the Point, named after the man who made a fortune by his invention of tin foil, only to lose it in silver mines. Attempts were made to preserve the harbor by building a bulkhead, but a woman property owner interposed. She thought it would harm her property, but she ended by having no property at all. The ocean washed it away.

The building of bulkheads to catch the westward drift of the sands is the remedy, it has been demonstrated, and that is one of the plans of the Great Kills Community Council who are petitioning that the city of New York acquire Crooks Point and adjacent meadow land, and from the whole create a fine harborage for commercial and pleasure purposes, a seaside park and bathing beach, with fishing and boating facilities available to the people of Greater New York.

As building materials, coal and so forth may be brought into a rejuvenated Great Kills harbor, kind offices with similar effect may be performed for Fresh Kills on the other side of the island. There and around Tottenville are flat lands ideal for the factories which a free port would require. And they are lands which are as historic as they are flat.

Great fleets of trucks may roar over the Richmond Turnpike, over which once rolled and rattled the coaches of the Royal Mail, protected by a mounted escort of redcoats clattering along at the flanks. Again vehicles may come to frequent the route of the mail coaches from New York to Philadelphia, with their ferrying over to Brooklyn, their run down the King's Highway, another ferrying to Tottenville, Staten Island, and yet another, after the turnpike was traversed, to Perth Amboy in New Jersey. A long trip in those days. But at the Jersey ferry, as elsewhere, was to be had refreshment—can its quality be doubted at hostelries with such names?—at the Tavearn or the Morning Star and the Tavern of the Blazing Star.

With a free port for Staten Island an accomplished fact, probably the Billop house at Tottenville will win a greatly deserved place as a shrine. Was it not old Christopher Billop that won Staten Island for New York?

The steep roof and the thick walls of the early-day homestead, receiving no aid from man, are yielding at last to time. Weeds and underbrush are doing their share to obliterate a landmark, fit to rank with the most famous council rooms in our history. For there, little known though it is, the fate of the country trembled in the balance.

It was to Staten Island, that convenient British military base, that three American peace commissioners hastened after the disastrous Battle of Long Island, where at the very outset of the war the American Army under Washington received a terrible and a crushing defeat. Under the high gabled roof of the Billop house, Franklin, Adams, and Edward Rutledge, of South Carolina, met with General Lord Howe to negotiate peace. For four hours they debated across the council table, but the commissioners of the Continental Congress would agree to no treaty that did not acknowledge the independence of the Colonies. Had peace been signed there, it would have rendered the old homestead more memorable, but that is fame of the sort that may be counted well lost.

Opportunity knocked once before at the door of Staten Island, when a similar project for harbor improvement was under consideration. A survey of Great Kills harbor was authorized by Congress and forthwith made by army engineers. The unfavorable report that resulted is said to have been directly attributable to the failure of the Staten Islanders to manifest any interest.

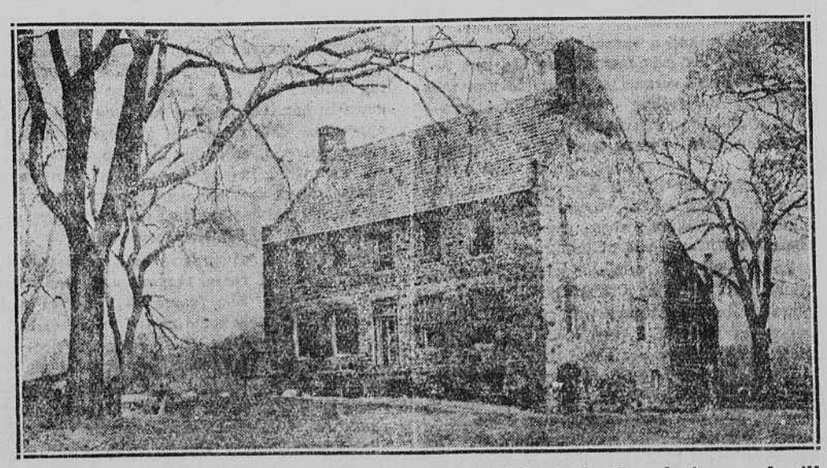
Five years having elapsed, by law the surveys of harbors may be made again, and again the sentiment of Staten Island must stand a survey, more successfully this time, many hope.

But if the plan is to be doomed by neglect a second time, it seems preferable that some plainer intimation be given that it is unwanted; something subtle, yet unmistakable.

In Revolutionary days a Staten Island belle who dwelled on the eminence that came to be known as Toad Hill was troubled by a superfluity of suitors. They were as persistent as they were many, and they overwhelmed romance by weight of numbers. At last the lady hit upon a method of weeding them out.

As she bade farewell of an evening to a suitor marked for rejection, she would approach to a delicious nearness. The young gentleman would walk home with his head in a whirl, but how different were his sensations when he discovered in the pockets of his best coat two toads placed there by her who had been the lady of his choice.

Thus convinced of the lady's lack of interest, gallants never returned to Toad Hill, even after five years.



The Billop House, Tottenville, built 107 years before the Revolution, and still standing as a reminder why Staten Island is part of New York rather than New Jersey